

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

Below is the entire set of pending claims pursuant to 37 C.F.R §1.121(c)(3)(i), with any mark-ups showing the changes made by the present Amendment.

1. (Currently amended) A plug fastener ~~adapted to connect a picket to a second article, the picket having an opening on at least one end,~~ comprising:

a first engaging portion surface having first ridges ~~adapted to frictionally engage an interior surface of the opening in the picket; and~~

a second engaging portion mating surface having second ridges ~~adapted to frictionally engage an interior surface of the second article, at least one of said first or second ridges slanted with respect to towards the other of the first or second ridges, the frictional engagement of the first engaging surface and the mating surface sufficient to fixedly connect the picket to the second article; and~~

an aperture extending through the plug fastener, the first and second ridges concentric with respect to the aperture.

2. (Canceled)

3. (Canceled)

4. (Canceled)

5. (Canceled)

6. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 1 wherein said first engaging surface has cross-sectional shape selected from the group consisting of rectangular, pentagonal, hexagonal, octagonal and other regular polygons having at least four sides.
7. (Currently amended) The plug fastener of claim 1 wherein at least one of said first and/or second ridges comprise an angled top surface, said angled top surface providing the slant of the at least one first or second ridges.
8. (Previously presented) The plug fastener of claim 1 wherein said first engaging surface has a shape selected from the group consisting of spheroidal, cylindrical, ellipsoidal, conical, elliptic conical frustum, pyramidal frustum, and ball.
9. (Canceled)
10. (Canceled)
11. (Currently amended) The plug fastener of claim 1 wherein the first and second ridges are deformable ridges ~~adapted to frictionally engage the opening in the second article when deformed.~~
12. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 10 wherein said mating surface includes a plurality of threads adapted to engage the opening in the second article.

13. (Previously presented) The plug fastener of claim 1 wherein said mating surface has a shape selected from the group consisting of spheroidal, cylindrical, ellipsoidal, conical, elliptic conical frustum, pyramidal frustum, and ball.

14. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 8 wherein said mating surface is flat, whereby said fastener is adapted to be affixed to a flat surface of said second article.

15. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 14 further comprising affixing means including at least one selected from the group consisting of bolthead, aperture having a regular polygonal cross-section, protrusion having regular polygonal cross-section, and countersink.

16. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 14 wherein the fastener is adapted to be hidden from view after the picket is fastened to the second article therewith.

17. (Withdrawn) A plug fastener adapted to engage a longitudinally oriented opening of a picket for attaching the picket at a right angle to a second article such as a rail, said plug fastener comprising:

a cylindrical member provided with a first engaging surface for engaging an interior surface of a first one of the picket and the second article; and

a second member connected to the cylindrical member at an opposing end, the second member provided with a second engaging surface for engaging an interior surface of a second one of the picket and the second article,

such that said plug fastener is adapted to be hidden from view after the picket is fastened to the second article therewith.

18. to 28. (Canceled)

29. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 1 wherein said mating surface is a flat surface that is adapted to lie flat on a flat surface of a second article.

30. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 29 further comprising an at least partially arcuate body on which said first engaging surface is disposed.

31. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 30 wherein said body comprises a generally barrel shape.

32. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 29 further comprising a longitudinal opening from a top end of said plug fastener to a bottom end of said plug fastener, said longitudinal opening adapted to receive an elongate fastener to connect said plug fastener to a second article.

33. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 29 further comprising a shaped body on which said first engaging surface is disposed, said shaped body permitting a snug fit into the interior surface of an opening in the picket.

34. (Withdrawn) The plug fastener of claim 29 wherein said first engaging surface includes a plurality of ridges to assist in creating a rigid fit within the opening in the picket.

35. to 48. (Canceled)

49. (Currently amended) The plug fastener of claim 1, wherein at least one of said first ridges is slanted in a direction opposite than a direction at least one of said second **deformable** ridges is slanted, and at least one of said second **deformable** ridges is slanted in a direction opposite than the direction the at least one of said first **deformable** ridges is slanted.

50. (New) The plug fastener of claim 11, wherein the first and second deformable ridges have resiliency sufficient to frictionally engage an interior surface within the opening in the picket when deformed.

51. (New) The plug fastener of claim 1, wherein the fastener is non-metallic.

52. (New) The plug fastener of claim 51, wherein the fastener comprises a material selected from the group consisting of plastics, nylon, polyvinyl chloride, synthetic rubber, and polyurethane.

53. (New) The plug fastener of claim 1, wherein the aperture further comprises at least one countersink formed at one end of the aperture.

54. (New) The plug fastener of claim 1, further comprising a fastening device disposed within the aperture.

55. (New) The plug fastener of claim 54, wherein the fastening device is a screw.

56. (New) The plug fastener of claim 1, wherein said first and second engaging portions of the fastener define a substantially spheroidal shape.

57. (New) A substantially spheroidal plug fastener, comprising:

an aperture extending through the plug fastener and having a first and a second opening;

a first hemisphere having first ridges concentric and orthogonal with respect to the aperture, the first hemisphere including the first opening; and

a second hemisphere having second ridges concentric and orthogonal with respect to the aperture, the second hemisphere including the second opening, wherein ends of the first and second ridges are tapered respectively from the first and second openings towards a maximum diameter of the plug fastener.

58. (New) The plug fastener of claim 57, wherein the first and second ridges are deformable ridges.

59. (New) The plug fastener of claim 58, wherein the first and second deformable ridges have resiliency sufficient to frictionally engage an interior surface within a cylindrical opening in a workpiece.

60. (New) The plug fastener of claim 59, wherein the fastener is non-metallic.

61. (New) The plug fastener of claim 60, wherein the fastener comprises a material selected from the group consisting of plastics, nylon, polyvinyl chloride, synthetic rubber, and polyurethane.

62. (New) The plug fastener of claim 57, wherein the aperture further comprises at least one countersink formed in the first or second opening.

63. (New) The plug fastener of claim 57, further comprising a fastening device disposed within the aperture.

64. (New) The plug fastener of claim 63, wherein the fastening device is a screw.